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A full-page photograph of Kevin Knight, a Black man with a shaved head, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a red and blue striped tie. He is standing with his arms crossed in a cemetery, with numerous white headstones visible in the background and lush green trees behind them. The lighting is natural, suggesting daytime.

📍 **Brother's Keeper**
Kevin Knight, at Winchester
National Cemetery in
Virginia—one of the military
burial sites that Knight
Solutions keeps shipshape

NO. 296

Kevin Knight • Knight Solutions • Three-year growth 1,472.2% • 2012 REVENUE \$16.3 MILLION

GIVING VETS—BOTH LIVING AND FALLEN—THE RESPECT THEY DESERVE

Kevin Knight imagined a future in the U.S. Army. But when he injured both eyes in a training accident, he chased a different dream—his own business, Knight Solutions—and wound up serving his nation in a different way.

I REMEMBER sitting in a chair in the doctor's office crying. He told me I was blind in my right eye and that I would be of no use to the Army. It was devastating.

Eventually, I graduated from Norfolk State University and then the University of Cincinnati, where I received my master's. I then worked for a number of big companies, like General Motors, that taught me what I needed to know to launch my own business.

I came to see the poor conditions of our military cemeteries when I went to the funeral of my brother-in-law, who was a Vietnam vet. It became my calling to turn those resting places around so that families can have a pleasant

experience visiting their loved ones.

I started making connections through the Department of Veterans Affairs. I explained that I wanted to take veterans who have seen action and hire them, give them a place where they would be able to say, "I did not leave my brother behind; I am taking care of him now." I launched Knight Solutions with the help of a mentor who enlightened me on the programs available to service-disabled-veteran-owned businesses.

When it comes to military cemeteries, all people think about is Arlington National. But there are more than 100 national cemeteries, some of which aren't kept to the standard they should be.

We're based in Leesburg, Virginia, but we provide cemetery restoration, construction, and grounds maintenance nationwide. Each job lasts about 12 to

18 months. We raise and realign each headstone and replace the sod. There is a standard for working on national cemeteries called the shrine standards, which requires that every headstone stand up straight, like a soldier. Anytime we start a new job, I remind our employees that there is zero tolerance for delivering anything less than that.

When we get a new contract, I call the VA hospital near the cemetery and talk to the veterans' rep to let them know I will be hiring a pool of veterans for the job. We set up a trailer as a base to get started and then move on to the next one. It's like having a mobile command center.

I get veterans who tell me their lives have been forever changed. Not only do they have stable employment with benefits, but they also have a sense of purpose in taking care of the resting place for their fallen brothers and sisters. **1**

"I did not leave my brother behind; I am taking care of him now."



SCAN THE PAGE TO TOUR A CEMETERY WITH KNIGHT. (Instructions, page 12)

As told to DARREN DAHL • Photograph by MELISSA GOLDEN

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